

My name is Jennifer Zagon and I am the proud mother of 3 sons. **My middle son Daniel has autism.** He will be 8 years old next week. I suspected Daniel had autism when he was 2 years old. He began Speech Therapy at 2 and a half and finally as his third birthday approached; a psychologist at his school confirmed my fears. Daniel was diagnosed with autism formally after his third birthday at the **cost of \$2500 which our insurance didn't pay.** I had already done my research and I knew that ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) would give Daniel the best chance at a "normal" life. I immediately started working with the HOPE Center at Beaumont with a behavior analyst while he was waiting to get into the GIFT program (which trains family members to implement the ABA therapy at home). **Each weekly visit was costing upwards of \$150** which we had to pay because we knew early intervention was critical for Daniel! Once he enrolled in the GIFT program with me, we began a daily program of 3 hours a day and homework was also assigned regularly. The cost was around **\$10,000 which again our Blue Care Network insurance didn't cover.** Also, during this program Daniel continued to attend a daily afternoon program at our local school for developmental delay and received one-on-one OT and small group speech therapy. After graduating from the HOPE Center program, I continued to work with Daniel daily 3 hours every morning and then after school also to make sure he was getting at least 15-25 hours of ABA a week. I also had an infant at the time which my mother would care for while I was implementing out home ABA program. My school age child was thankfully in school during much of Daniel's home therapy. **I also had to bring Daniel back to the Center on a regular basis, sometimes once a week (all self-paid mind you)** to progress and update his home program. I have worked very hard being not only Daniel's therapist but also his advocate. Being your own child's therapist is not something any parent should have to do but it was necessary as **my husband and I could not afford the \$10,000 every 12 weeks to continue his ABA with the facility.** It was better for me to quit my job and devote all my efforts to Daniel's autism than to end up bankrupt as so many others have unfortunately had to do. But, I do wonder, what if a behavior analyst had treated Daniel, would he be further along, maybe he would have never received the autism label in school. I will never know. But I am proud of how far he has come and proud of myself for digging deep and "putting my helmet on" as my husband Bill says. Bill and I were very lucky to have supportive family and friends who were able to donate and help fundraise money to help us pay for these much needed therapies. Many people don't have this type of strong support system my husband Bill and I are lucky enough to have!

Towards the end of his preschool years, we began using Play Therapy and working with a Play Coach who was absolutely wonderful but once again, we were footing the bill! The Play Therapy was very helpful in another vital component, relating to and engaging and playing with other people. I would use the Play Therapy or floor time to help lure Daniel out of the introverted world he was living in!

I believe that this combination of therapies including ABA has helped my son be the child that he is today. Daniel is a high functioning child with autism. Daniel is at Burger School for Autism in Garden City in a high functioning classroom because our own school district didn't have a spot for him. Although Burger does not use ABA their small class size and use of positive behavior supports is ensuring Daniel's success! I received a call from his school psychologist yesterday who said she had conducted her testing on him for his 3 year MET assessment on 3/6/12. She indicated that Daniel did

very well and that he was able to attend and sit for all the testing she administered. She also observed him in his classroom and was impressed by his ability to sit and attend to a task and interact with his friends. She also told me that he is reading at a mid first grade level and his math scores reveal a mid second grade level, right on track! **I strongly believe that I can credit Daniel's early intervention of ABA and other therapies to the results of his testing performed 2 days ago!** My son is living proof that early intervention, particularly ABA makes a difference in setting the stage for a child's success in learning in overcoming autism. My son needed to "learn to learn" and ABA gave him those skills!

So in closing, please support these bills to cover autism under our insurance private insurances. **We pay \$4784 in medical insurance premiums annually.** Please vote to pass these bills so our insurance company can pay for the continued therapy my son needs to succeed in life, not us! My son Daniel deserves to become a productive tax paying member of society just as much as his two loving brothers, Rob and Jack!

Thank you!

